

St. Martin-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church
Keller, Texas
Sermon for February 7, 2021 ~ Epiphany 5B
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A question the Church must address in our time is one which must have been unnecessary to address very often in the early Church: "How do I share my faith." Surveys have revealed that of all the aspects of Christianity, sharing the faith is the one people feel most uncomfortable about. When we look at third world countries, we see that faith sharing seems easier for people and the results are phenomenal. When we look at our own country, we are more apt to see that faith is awkwardly shared, if at all and the results underwhelming. Or, faith is abusively shared and the results are destructive. How can we learn to share our faith?

Perhaps we should begin by remembering that faith is basically a trusting relationship with God. The prophet Isaiah gives us an awesome portrait of God who creates all things and is everlasting. God is so great that it is not possible for the human being to fully understand or comprehend him. And yet, Isaiah tells us, he gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. He puts strong wings under weary lives. He is perfectly trustworthy!

People often speak of God in ways that affirm God's majestic power yet, to me, undermine God's trustworthiness. I'm thinking of people who give God credit for illness and tragedy and misfortune. "God took him." "This earthquake was God's will." "Her sickness is God's punishment." I'm not sure how you can experience a trusting relationship with a God who may zap you or someone you love at any moment. Sharing "faith" in a God like that is worse than not sharing faith at all.

"But those who wait [for the God and Father of Jesus Christ] shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." When we come to know this loving God, trust will be the natural response, because God is trustworthy.

Then, try to remember that our problem is not the greatness of God, but the greatness of our faith. And, faith that is never shared cannot be very great. I like to describe faith as one of the muscles human beings have. When it is exercised, it grows stronger and more effective. When it is not exercised, it is almost useless. Faith is meant to be exercised, and part of the exercise of faith is sharing it with others in word and in deed.

St. Paul's faith was great enough for him to lay down his concern for his own needs, move beyond his comfort zone, and enter into the world of others with the good news of Jesus Christ. He went where the healing and transforming message was needed among people, often people different from him, and he shared it in terms they could understand. Paul wanted the greatness of his faith to approach the greatness of the One he was called to serve.

Today is Boy Scout Sunday. Scouting is built upon a foundation known as "the aims and methods." The aims are character, citizenship, and fitness. The methods are ideals, patrols, outdoors, advancement, personal growth, adult association, leadership development, and the uniform. The aims are delivered by the methods. The very first aspect of the aim of character has to do with duty to God. Every Scout and Scout leader is expected to live a life which expresses their relationship with the God they worship. The Scout leader encourages the Scout to know and serve God by example and through the various methods Scouting offers. But the Scout leader also knows that they have to have faith in God. There are a lot of other influences that can enter a young person's life that are not so good. The Scout leader prays for the Scouts and

believes that the program will make the most difference in each young life. That requires a great faith in a great and good God!

And, faith in God is less apt to proceed from miracles than miracles from faith in God. Faith summons us from the bleachers where we sit and wait for a miracle to happen and compels us to go out onto the playing field where we get involved in miracles. It is only a few yards from the synagogue in Capernaum to the house that is supposed to be where Simon Peter lived. When Jesus and his disciples left the synagogue they went straight to Simon Peter's house where his mother-in-law lay sick. Jesus reached out to her and touched her and she was healed. Then she got up and served them all. Was her faith the result of the miracle of healing or was the miracle the result of her faith? I believe the latter. She trusted him and her trust was not in vain.

Mark portrays Jesus as wanting to keep his identity as Messiah a secret during his Galilean ministry. Scholars suggest that this is because Mark wanted it to be perfectly clear that the chief reason for faith in Christ is his saving work on the cross. The crucified and risen Lord, not simply the Galilean miracle worker, is the One in whom we are to put our trust.

Then, our encounter with Jesus in Word and Sacrament equips us for our encounter with him in the lives of others. It was the way in which Mother Theresa shared her faith that finally brought a skeptic like Malcolm Muggeridge to confess his own personal faith in God. He wrote a book about his encounter with her titled, *Something Beautiful for God*. In the book, he asks Mother Theresa, "in the light of the overwhelming problems of Calcutta's mass of people, don't you ever get discouraged? Don't you agree with those who say these things should be done by great state organizations? Isn't it absurd for a few loving souls to tackle such a problem?"

She replies: "If the world is looked at just by our own eyes and only from our own way, naturally, we ourselves can do nothing. But in Christ we can do all things. We give it and we do it to God, to Christ, and that's why we try to do it as beautifully as possible...it is the same contact we have with Christ in the Sacrament. There we have Jesus in the appearance of bread. But here in the slums, in the broken bodies, in the children, we see Christ and we touch him."

As we learn to know and trust him as he is revealed in Word and Sacrament, we learn to recognize him and his call to us in the faces of those he is calling us to share our faith with. Because we hear the Word and receive the Sacrament regularly, we learn that to share our faith is natural and easy.

They use a special incense in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Its scent clings to peoples' clothing. In spite of themselves, they become walking advertisements for the One they've worshipped. It's like that with everyone who's been with Jesus. Others know him through us.

But I'm not really good enough to share my faith with anybody, you may think. Let me tell you a story about an auction in a small town in New Mexico. The auction was to raise money for a community center. Among the items to be auctions was an old dusty violin. When the time came, nobody would bid on it. Then, a man nobody knew came from the back of the room and took it into his arms and played it. He was a master violinist. Its beautiful sound filled the room and touched everyone's heart. Then the bids came. You see, we are all much like that old violin. What becomes of us depends on the touch of the Master.

Think of that the next time you are wondering how to share your faith. Let the Master, in whose hands we place our lives, show us how.